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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002974

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: EVO'S DIPLOMATS: AFRAID, IRRELEVANT, ENDANGERED

REF: A. LA PAZ 2587

[1](#)B. LA PAZ 2626

[1](#)C. LA PAZ 2500

[1](#)D. LA PAZ 2456

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Foreign Ministry contacts complain career diplomats are increasingly ignored in foreign policy decisions, citing the decision to advance diplomatic relations with Iran as a prime example. They consistently described a battle over foreign policy between the MFA and advisors at the Presidential Palace, personified in a feud between Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca and Presidential Minister (Chief of Staff) Juan Quintana. Careerists are being sidelined at higher ranks and shadowed at lower ranks by political appointees or contractors. Although there has been no broad purge (as is the case in other ministries), more than 20 returning diplomats from overseas posts have been placed on unpaid administrative leave. Until a recently adopted policy reserving one careerist position at each foreign post, nearly all overseas positions were being filled by political appointees. Bolivian Foreign Service institutions are crumbling under assault by the government. End Summary.

Wanted: Political Cronies, No Experience Required  
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[1](#)2. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion Legal Advisor Yovanka Oliden Tapia (please protect all MFA contacts) told PolOff that, until recently, no new careerists have been sent abroad since Evo took power in January, 2006. (Note: Besides careerist holdovers still posted overseas, Evo appointed career diplomats to ambassadorships in Brazil and the Netherlands last month. End Note.) All of the more than 20 returning diplomats have been placed on administrative leave without pay. This number could double in the coming months as this is prime rotation season. Although the Foreign Service Law does protect careerists from being fired, it also allows the Foreign Ministry to replace end-of-tour officers at will. (Note: there are about 70 careerists stationed abroad of about 270 total career Foreign Service Officers. End Note.) Jorge Caballero, Cabinet Director for the Vice-Foreign Minister, also referred to returning diplomats in "limbo" September 25, adding they are being replaced by

ruling MAS party loyalists.

Careerists at Posts: And Then There Was One ...

13. (C) Oliden said some Ambassadors pushed for a stop to the wholesale replacement of careerists during an MFA meeting to discuss overseas staffing late in September. She claimed even "political" Ambassadors argued for a minimal number of careerists to get the work done. This resulted in a new policy requiring at least one careerist per post.

Fear and Loathing at Chancellery

14. (C) According to Oliden, only two out of 16 MFA Directors are careerists. Even at sub-director level, she asserted careerists are being relegated to menial tasks in an effort to force them to leave so they can be replaced with political appointees. The Foreign Service Law protects them from being fired, but they can be shuffled or placed on administrative leave for "insubordination."

15. (C) Director of Foreign Commerce Patricia Sanjines told PolOff employees are generally afraid to speak on the phone for fear they are tapped, although she conceded this was probably an unfounded fear. "Everyone is afraid of losing their jobs and is playing it safe." In addition, Caballero told PolOff not to contact him on his work phone or e-mail expect for "official" business and not to mention careerists favorably in public, out of fear of repercussions for being associated with the Embassy.

Pink Slip Panic Postponed, For Now

16. (C) Sanjines said even if the Morales administration could conduct a wholesale purge of careerists, it would probably hold off for the short term, partly to avoid a legal battle regarding the Foreign Service Law, but also because political appointees need careerists to make the ministry work. Careerists help political appointees navigate technical documents, international agreements, and foreign policy protocol. "We know where the files are. For the moment they cannot do it (foreign policy work) without us." She said the government has been slow to replace technocrats at the Central Bank for similar reasons.

Careerists Afraid of Their "Shadows"

17. (C) Sanjines said instead of replacing working level staff, the administration has brought in political appointees as contractors to shadow existing staff. In her section, they typically mirror economic sector or negotiation specialists in a particular sector or negotiation, such as CAN (Andean Community of Nations), ALBA (Bolivian Alternative for the Americas), or ATPA (Andean Trade Preferences Act). Sanjines fears it is only a matter of time before these apprentices learn enough that the administration feels comfortable replacing careerists. She also fears when the Constituent Assembly is adjourned, the MAS friendly members will "be looking for jobs, maybe our jobs." That's when she suspects the ultimate test of the Foreign Service Law will begin.

Hear no MFA, See No MFA, Speak No MFA

18. (C) Oliden explained careerists are afraid to speak their minds and resigned to keeping their heads down since the courts decided against them last summer, ruling the Foreign Service Law only guaranteed positions if they were "open." Since the Government fills all rotations with political appointees, there are no open positions, and, according to the decision, no basis to complain. Oliden said careerists are done complaining to courts or other government oversight offices because "who would we complain to? The government

controls everything."

¶9. (C) Caballero provided a more optimistic assessment. He said the Presidential Palace does listen to MFA experts, but "only to a point." They did act on MFA advice to stop a Bolivian deputy (national representative from lower house) from speaking in Spain with a group linked to the terrorist-affiliated ETA organization (Basque Homeland and Freedom), grounding the plane in Santa Cruz to explain the situation to the deputy, who was oblivious to the group's ETA links.

#### Iran Case: Careerists Sidelined

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¶10. (C) Oliden and Sanjines said careerists were against and surprised by the decision to open diplomatic relations with Iran (refs b-d). Before the change in course, the issue was considered a rare example of their advice being followed, according to Sanjines. Now "that is gone" and people are even more reluctant to stick their necks out on policy issues. Caballero claimed the MFA drafted a report advising against diplomatic relations with Iran that was disregarded by Morales' inner circle of advisors. The report allegedly argued Iran had little to offer Bolivia and that Bolivia risked global isolation if it pursued relations. It also warned against petroleum technology exchanges that would encourage reliance on Soviet-era technology. He suspected Morales never saw it, as he appears to see no down side to the relationship and touts Iranian technology publicly.

¶11. (C) Ruben Vidaurre, Director of Multilateral Affairs, told PolOff that Bolivia's delegation to the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors was called during an early-September meeting by "high levels" in the Foreign Minister and ordered to abstain from commenting on the IAEA-Iran Action Plan (reftel). He claimed the delegation "fully understood" and "did not disagree" with our demarche arguments, but that it was "out of our hands."

¶12. (C) Sanjines said after two years, employees are increasingly aware that broad foreign policy direction comes from a tight circle of advisors at the Presidential Palace, most prominently Venezuelans, and have stopped offering unsolicited advice as futile and career adverse. She said the government would never have considered diplomatic relations with Iran in its early days, but now with economic and political problems looming, it is grasping at desperate measures. She downplayed Iran's \$1.1 billion pledge of investment and technical assistance over five years as a fantasy for a country half a world away with "zero trade relations with Bolivia." She asserted people would forget about these promises in five years or make excuses why they were not realized. Although some in Morales' inner circle have high hopes for Iranian investment, she asserted the main reason for the change was to "poke a finger in the eye" of the U.S., please Hugo Chavez, and create a sovereignty issue to distract from the government's domestic performance.

#### RIP: Institutional Professionalism

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¶13. (C) Oliden lamented that Foreign Service institutions were either being deconstructed by the Morales administration or abandoned by hopeless and fearful careerists. Her examples:

- The promotion board, a defender of merit and standards, was dismissed after Evo took office.
- No one ran in the February 2007 elections for the MFA's employee association. Careerists have given up on the organization as a counterweight to administration abuses and consider running for leadership not worth the career risk.
- The MFA diplomacy school is still "open," but it has stopped offering classes. Incoming diplomats are now sent to Venezuela for a six-month course instead of the two-year Bolivian course. Sanjines opined it is better the school offers no classes, rather than courses developed by a new teaching staff to favor indoctrination over technical

competence. She fears incoming classes will have no "academic foundation" to be effective Foreign Service officers.

#### Let's Get Ready to Rumble: Choquehuanca v. Quintana

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¶14. (C) Caballero described two ideological battles currently raging: between careerists and advisors in the Presidential Palace and between Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca and Presidential Minister (Chief of Staff) Juan Quintana. He said Quintana has achieved rough parity with Choquehuanca on international issues, much to Choquehuanca's irritation. On November 5, Caballero advised the Embassy to focus on expanding contact with Choquehuanca as a counterweight to the radically anti-U.S. Quintana. He said although Quintana has the advantage of being in the palace, Choquehuanca is Evo's friend and has his ear.

¶15. (C) Oliden confirmed that there has been intense feuding between Choquehuanca and Quintana during the last few months. She claimed Morales sided with Choquehuanca when Choquehuanca complained about Quintana's meddling in foreign policy in October, but would not disclose how she knew this. She asserted Choquehuanca, with his indigenous credentials, is too symbolically valuable to "move down" and has opined in the past that he was one step removed from foreign policy process by not being at the palace. Oliden and Sanjines gave guarded praise for Choquehuanca, particularly when compared with other MAS options for Foreign Minister, for his honesty and consideration of careerist advice, even though he rejects much of it.

#### Other Ministries More MASified

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¶16. (C) Despite harsh treatment of returning diplomats and the climate of fear prevalent in the Chancellery, Oliden and Sanjines asserted the Foreign Ministry has actually fared much better than others without the protection of the Foreign Service Law that have been gutted of professional staff. Thus far no one has been "replaced" the Foreign Ministry, in contrast to other ministries that have become spoils shops for friends of MAS leadership. Sanjines cited the Ministry of Mirco-Credit, which put its employees on leave shortly after Morales took over in 2006. When they returned to the renamed Ministry of Economic Production and Micro-Enterprise, most of them found pink slips waiting for them. Now most career staffers in most ministries have been replaced. The ministries of development, justice, and agriculture were hardest hit with about 70 to 90 percent turnover, according to Sanjines' rough estimate.

#### Civil Service Superintendent Superpoliticized

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¶17. (C) Rodolfo Illanes Alvarado, Superintendent of Civil Service since December 2006, told PolOff complaints from employees are actually down to about 220 in 2007 so far, compared with almost 600 in 2003. He attributed this to the "corrupt, unfair" rule of former President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in 2003, in contrast to the current administration's regard for "justice." He described his job as protecting civil servants from unfair practices. He planned to focus on hiring complaints, to ensure that "people with foreign last names" are denied the preferential treatment they have had in the past. He explained MFA employees were out of his purview because of the Foreign Service Law (they would complain to the Public Defenders Office instead), but nevertheless opined the law could be changed to allow outright firings of careerists. Illanes dismissed any professional downside to such a change, adding that he is a political appointee.

#### Comment:

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¶18. (C) Sending diplomats to administration "purgatory" without pay is only semantically different from firing them.

With the court's decision endorsing a purge-friendly interpretation of the Foreign Service Law and crumbling Foreign Service institutions, the climate of fear and hopelessness described by our MFA contacts seems sadly justified. The Morales administration seems torn between wanting to fill the MFA with rank amateurs and understanding they need careerists to keep it working. We can expect an upswing in misunderstandings, lack of communication, and use of public statements at the expense of formal diplomatic channels at Bolivia's embassies as careerists are moved out. We expect a continued feuding between Choquehuanca and Quintana over the execution of Bolivian foreign policy. End Comment.

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